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Subject: The God of Pity.

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A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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IV. TREASURE THAT CANNOT BE STOLEN.
V. BEARING, BUT NOT OVERBORNE.
VI. THE HOLY SPIRIT.
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THE GOD OF PITY.

"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."—Psa. CIII., 13, 14.

These words are like a fountain in the wilderness. There is in nature no evidence of pity. The revelation of it in God must have sprung from some other source than the teachings of natural law.

The whole Psalm is wonderful, if it be contrasted with the notions of the age in which it was written respecting God. There was much in the mythology of the civilized heathen which was attractive to the imagination. Certainly, grace and beauty have found no more admirable exposition than in Greek mythology. But the heathen gods were heartless. They were devoid of elevation of sentiment. They were still more devoid of sympathy and pity. And, for that matter, all other mythologies and heathenisms have been utterly bereft of the sentiment of pity in their divinities. They have been just—at least in name; they have been stern; they have been patriotic—for they have been gods of nations; but the element of sympathy—sympathy with human sin, and with the results or effects of it—belongs entirely to the God of the Bible. A higher conception of God's character in its domestic element is not anywhere to be found than this. Pity is a state of kindness excited by the sight of suffering.

1. There is no evidence to be derived of the existence of pity in any overruling Deity, as far as the laws of nature reveal the divine character. I am speaking of the vast organism of the globe, and what we call natural, material laws. Looking out upon things as they are, it would seem almost as if some being of wondrous wisdom and wondrous might had builded a vast machine, illimitable in its might, and as if by its irresistible force it moved on, crushing some, bearing on others, producing a thousand fruits of good, and a thousand mischiefs, itself unknowing and unconscious both of the one and of the other. The benefits that we derive from natural laws are benefits which are given to us, as it were, out of a cold hand. To those who think upon the course of time, and the history of events, nothing excites more surprise, nothing seems stranger, than the cruelties which nature has set

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on foot. The organization of the animal kingdom upon the principle of destructiveness; the making of one thing food for another; the ignorance of man in respect to natural law, and in respect to the crushing influences of disobedience of natural law; the want of any sign in nature of sympathy for those who are dying by reason of their ignorance—these things go to show that we must look in some other direction if we would find pity.

The child lies sick, and you throw back the window blinds, and the morning sun falls upon its little head; and it seems for the moment as though the sun did pity the child and the parents, and as though this was its benediction; and yet, if you look out upon the window-sill, it is but the same thing which it is doing for that. It is but just what it would do for an apple that hung upon the bough. It knows no affection. It cares neither for the child, nor for those that suffer for it. The affection is in us, and is transferred to it, if the thought comes to us.

A thousand, and a thousand, and a thousand men fell upon the field of Gettysburgh. The sky did not care; the winds did not care; the earth did not care; the jolly fat soil that sent up a richer crop of grass did not care; the trees that never grew so lush as out of blood (strange food for those trees), did not care. And yet, a million hearts were aching for the scenes that transpired there. In nature there was no knowledge, and no sympathy or pity, nor any sign of any. Looking only on the face of nature, one uninstructed would say, "The God of nature does not know what it is to sorrow for anything, or for anybody." Is nature his? Did he make it? Did he make it on purpose? Did he make it so cruel and heartless? These are questions that one is prone to ask.

The study of nature leads us to see creative design in other respects. Men that study the material world come to have a sense of creative power in an eminent degree. More, they come to have a profound sense of creative wisdom, and wisdom evinced in design, as well.

Nay, there are some indications which, taken by themselves, would lead one to think that he who created this material globe was good, because there are a thousand tendencies that move toward good. But this is combatted by a thousand other tendencies which seem to move toward evil. Nevertheless, a man who is benevolent, and sympathetic, and who takes a large view of the structure of the globe, is likely to suppose that the one who made this natural world was a God of goodness. But if you turn from goodness to taste, to beauty, to exquisite harmony, nobody can doubt that he who created the world was a lover of beauty, and that the elements of beauty were in his nature. Yet, when one studies the structure of this natural world to ascertain what

kind of a being that must be who made it, where is there anything that shall suggest pity? I do not know. It is a most remorseless nature. It is a most unpitying nature. It destroys men. Myriads of lives are crushed out by it every hour. And there is no sorrow, no holding back, no leniency, no sign of pity, anywhere.

Following up the trail of this thought, we shall begin to find, in the lower range of animated creation, a trace—or that germ which finally becomes a trace—of feeling. It first develops itself in the very narrowest form of affection. There seems to be, among some of the lowest orders of animals, the rudest beginnings of affection toward their offspring. It does not seem to go any further than that. Nor is it manifested toward their offspring except in the very slightest measure. But as we rise from the lower to the higher organized animals, there does begin to be a very distinct manifestation of affection. It becomes very strong, very piteous, even, and extremely beautiful. The affection of animals for their young is stronger than their love of their own lives. Among the higher animals there are a few that go further, and seem to show pity. Dogs seem to show pity. And yet *Dog* is the term of reproach the world around. Next to a man a dog and a horse are the best things, I think, on the globe—though they are the most abused and most contemned in speech. In the matter of disinterested and enduring affection—affection that risks all—a dog would put many and many a man to shame. How many men will go and sit down on a master's grave and die of starvation there because he is dead? A dog will!

Not only dogs, but birds show pity. Of course it is in a very limited way, and only occasionally. Not all birds show great affection for their young; but blackbirds have been known, seeing a little robbin that had fallen out of the nest, and had been abandoned by its parents, and was not large enough to feed itself, to go to work and hunt food for it, and bring to it regularly, till it was able to feed itself. This, certainly, was an inflection of pity. It was not the blackbird's own species. The blackbird knew that it was not its own. The blackbird has a way of knowing what is and what is not its own.

So there is, among these lower orders of creation, the first blush of that which in the higher organization of the human race becomes pity.

Among men the feeling of pity is first disclosed in a very clear way. In rude and savage races you see it occasionally. There are some—a few—very noble natures among the lowest savages. They are uncultured, of course, and their kindness is rude. It has never been studious of special ways of showing itself. Nevertheless, it is there, and does manifest itself.

As civilization advances, the brutal and cruel qualities of the races decrease, and pity and compassion increase. The carrying of man up

toward the ideal of manhood, develops him away from force and brutality, and toward pity and compassion. True manhood, therefore, lies in that direction. The further you go from typical man, the more you lose pity as a constituent element. The further you go from the rude germ of creation, up toward its perfect development, the more large and ample and glowing becomes the emotion of pity, and the use of it in human life.

The highest nations have it in the largest measure; and among nations, the largest and noblest natures have it in the strongest degrees. Therefore, when we look upon human society, in distinction from the material and organized globe, and take that to be the creation of some personal being, we are prepared to say that there is evidence, if we examine the history of the race, that there is a God of pity, who organized such beings, and gave them such constituent faculties. We are prepared to believe that the analogy of this line of development continues, and that in angels it is as much superior to what it is in the highest men, as in the highest men it is superior to what it is in the lowest. And we are prepared to believe that, above angels and all supernal beings, in God himself, it takes on a grandeur and dignity utterly inconceivable to men, and commensurate with the infiniteness of God's whole nature.

2. When we look at human society, we must go through a like process to that which we have now been going through. If we look at it as an organization, I think we shall find that it does not fitly serve as an analogue to the divine nature. We shall not read God's nature, and the nature of God's government aright, if we undertake to infer them from what we see in the administration of government among men. And yet, this is the most common mode of deriving our theories of moral government, as it is the most common method by which we undertake to ascertain and to frame the peculiar administration and nature of God. But I will show that it is an eminently faulty analogue. Civil and criminal law may be humane; but they cannot have pity, as such. It is an abstraction to speak of law. We scarcely can separate law from the administration of it by officers.

Laws then, cannot have sympathy with the culprit. Neither can magistrates, except as men; and the man breaks through into the magistrate perpetually. Magistrates may have sympathy; but in a purely official character they cannot. That is not what they were made magistrates for. It is contrary to the function which they were set to discharge. As a ruler, a man cannot have pity. *The soul that sinneth, it shall suffer—it shall die*, is just as true in abstract and absolute civil government, as it is in material nature. If there is any pity, it is limited, and must be regarded as a kind of interpolation. Government

was not meant for purposes of restoration. It was meant to be a restraining, guiding, penal institution. It does not undertake to exercise all moral attributes and offices. It would be impossible for it to do it. You may say that a judge ought to be upright. You may say that a magistrate ought to be pure. You may say that all rulers ought to be pitying and kind. And as men they ought to be, and may be, and often are. But looking at their abstract design, standing as the representatives of law and government, we see that kindness and pity are no part of the function that they were expected to assume or exercise.

Human society itself is a rude and clumsy organization of human forces. Men cannot stop the progress of business, men cannot suspend rules, men cannot make exceptions every day, in order to take care of the weak. The business of human society is like a treadmill. It does not go by the volition of the men that are on it, but by machinery; and men must step on, or be dragged round and round. Organized business is obliged to hold on in its steady course, and more or less disregard the weak and the suffering. It cannot undertake to play an eleemosynary part. If it were to undertake to do what an individual could do, more harm than good would come of it. The vast complicated factory cannot stop all its functions to relieve one that is suffering, without throwing fifty others into suffering.

And this is not because society is so perfect, but because it is so weak. It is because human organizations, whether of government or business, are but expedients, and very clumsy expedients. As compared with barbarity, organizations are admirable; but as compared with a perfect government, they are extremely rude. Organized business is a thing of law; and law is always hard and unrelenting.

3. Above all other places, it is in the family and in the individual heart that we find the full disclosure of pity, or a state of sympathy and helpfulness in view of another's suffering. There pity may expand and have free course. If, then, one would gain the clearest ideas of the scope and nature of pity, he must study it in the family. Parents of large-mindedness and great goodness; parents that are just and benevolent — they are the ones that we must study; not loose, silly, over-indulgent parents; not those that love their children in such a way as to spoil them, but persons of discretion, of moral ideas, of magnitude, and firmness; persons that have an intense sense of right and wrong, honor and dishonor, goodness and evil; persons that love their children so that they desire to bring them up into real moral strength. They are the ones that we must study if we wish to come to a true idea of the nature of pity.

What, then, do we see in looking at such men? We see that love inflicts pain. There is not a father that is fit to be called *father*, who

does not sometimes punish his child because he loves him. There is not a mother so tender that she does not sometimes give her child intentional pain. Strange would that child be that never required it. Children are perpetually throwing themselves, by reason of their ignorance, upon wrong ways; and if they are well organized they will have the unregulated principle of firmness and tenacity of will; and that must go through drill and education. The child does not know any better; and that is the way it is to be taught better. All our earlier teaching goes through the basilar faculties. It is fear—nay lower than fear, it is sentient suffering—that infuses our very earliest ideas, and precedes all ideas. Beginning at the lowest point, we have to work our way gradually up through the social and spiritual elements. And every wise, just, pure, high-minded, noble, loving father or mother punishes the child. I do not say that parents necessarily take the "rod;" but there is a rod in *no*. There is a rod in a frown. The parent inflicts pain upon the child in order to drill it; in order to keep it from sin; in order to develop it into true manliness. And it is because parents love, that they let the child suffer, measuring the suffering, grading it, holding it back to just the proper proportions, that it may not over-reach the end it has in view.

We see, also, that where suffering is inflicted by a wise and loving parent, the object of it is not to avenge a wrong done to the parent. The object of suffering is two-fold—to bring a motive to bear upon the child which shall recover it, and also to save the other children from being brought into the same predicament of mischief. Both are objects of love. When a child has gone wrong, if a parent is angry let him stand off. Never punish a child when you are angry. "Well," you say, "when I am good-natured I cannot." All the worse for you and the child. No justice in this world is worthy of the name of justice that has not a heart of pity. There is no right in any human being to inflict pain to satisfy a revengeful impulse. That is beastly. No true parent inflicts pain upon a child except because he feels that that is the best gift he can confer upon that child, and because, incidentally, it is a benefit conferred upon every other child—for sometimes one whipping in a family is vicarious, and saves a multitude of strokes. The point is, that when parents love their children, they inflict pain upon them, not for the sake of avenging themselves for some personal slight or affront, but for the sake of the children's good, and the good of the children's brothers and sisters.

We see, also, that pity in the family of a wise, upright, large-minded man, is consistent with penalty. The parent is sorry for the child that he is punishing; and just so soon as the punishment has checked the evil in the child, the parent helps to cure the very suffering

which he himself has caused. He and the child are not enemies because they are at the two ends of the whip. The whip is held by the heart at one end, and it is meant to reach the heart at the other end — though it does it by devious ways. In the administration of pain in the family, love administers it; and it is for the purposes of love that it is administered. And when it has wrought its end, love cures it. So that from beginning to end it is love-work, as we see it in the ripest and best natures on earth.

In our endeavors to interpret God, we should remember that the Bible draws from three great sources. When it attempts to set God before our minds, it draws the illustrations of divine power, or the natural attributes of God, from nature. Storms, fire, floods, the seasons, mountains, the various material forces — these are all marshalled around about the name of God, to illustrate his natural attributes. And they can go no further than that.

When God's administration over the race and nations is taught in the Bible, the figures are drawn from human institutions in society. Rude and imperfect as they are, they do convey to us the idea that God is a being who is governing for all time multitudes, by general principles, and that there is in the administration of general principles certain elements that make it impossible for God to do some things that might be done if there were but a single being in the universe. But this is as far as we ought to follow civil institutions as analogues.

The third great source from which the Bible draws its illustrations and figures is the family — and this is the main source. If you will take the trouble to read through the Old and the New Testaments, and take all the cases in which God is called "Father," and in which men are called "sons;" if you will take all the illustrations of marriage and parentage; if you will take all the household illustrations; if you will take all the titles that are given to God, you will see in what an immense disproportion God has been represented to us in the Bible, not by nature, not by civil governments, but by the domestic relations of men in the family. The Church is God's household; and the prayer that we learned to lisp with our earliest days; the prayer that as a blessing has hung over the world for two thousand years, and that still, morning and night, is breathed by myriad infant lips — "Our Father which art in heaven" — interprets the nature of God from the side of the family.

Only in the highest form of the life of the family can we approximate to the liberty which there is in love; to the compassion which there is in justice; to God's sorrow for suffering, which nevertheless he permits. You find that whatever you see in the administration of divine providence by way of infliction, or permission, or remedy for suffering, in this world, answers to something that you have seen in

the voluntary administration of the family trust by parents that you know to be wise, just, pure, and good. Anything that conflicts with that may safely be set aside as the fiction of man, and not as the revelation of the Word of God.

In view of these statements, I remark

First. Pity on the part of God will not prevent the infliction of penalty among transgressors. It does not do it among ourselves. It ought not to do it among ourselves. We did not need to be taught that God would punish. All nature has been teaching us that. Penalty is the thing with which men have been most familiar in this world. Groans, tears, suffering, sickness, sorrow, death, wars, pestilences, all the agencies of the heavens, and all the powers of the earth, have been up and doing; and we did not need to have it told us that there was penalty for violated law. There is not a bone that does not call out that. There is not a nerve nor muscle that does not show that. There is not a single sin in human history that does not teach that. What we need to have taught us is that suffering is not brutal; that it is not unregulated; that it is for a moral end. Above all, we need to have it taught us that God, who permits and inflicts the suffering, does not hate; is not cruel; is not infernal; is not devilish. We need to be taught that it is possible for a Being to permit suffering in a globe like this, and yet be an eminent Lover. It is this teaching that we need, and it is this that we have got in the revelation of Christ in the New Testament. It is the disclosure that in the midst of all these terrific scenes in the history of the world, there is a purpose of love running through them from beginning to end; that there is a remedial nature given to them; that they are characterized, not by vengence, but by love. Listen:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

A doom was on the city; and yet, the Saviour wept over it, and lamented as a mother laments over her first-born child. God permits suffering in this world, he inflicts it; and, yet, he is a God of infinite love and mercy

Secondly. Those who are suffering the just consequences of their sins are not on that account excluded from God's pity. When God punishes, he does not feel about punishment as we do. We bring our brutal feelings to bear to drive home punishment. God punishes with great compassion and pity while he punishes, and with great mercy in store for us, if only we knew how to avail ourselves of it. We must take pain here.

The remedial importance of this truth, and the perversion of our ideas respecting it, demand that we should consider a little more in detail the matter that while God inflicts suffering in cleansing men from their sins, they are not on that account excluded from his pity.

Consider how impossible it is to infer anything from the lower creation of the feelings of God. Consider the way in which society treats criminals. Consider the way in which individual men treat those who have offended against them. I know not that there remains in society a work of barbarism greater than the feeling which we all have—which you have, which I have, which everybody has who has not been trained out of it—toward criminals. Where men have committed thefts, robberies, crimes, great violations; where men have by their wrong conduct inflicted suffering on others, the moment it is understood, the whole community rise up like a kennel of wild beasts. It may be said that this is an unregulated impulse of justice; but the moment a crime is fastened on a man, there comes a revolution in our thoughts and feelings toward him, and we do not regard him as belonging to the human race any more. We do not believe that we are related to him by the least duty of humanity. We do not think it is a sin to feel toward him as we do not feel toward any other human creature. And when his crime has been proved, and sentence has been passed upon him, how nobody cares because he is disgraced! How few there are that would ever shed a tear because so noble a nature as every human being has in him has been disfigured, soiled, and prostituted to cruelty and wrong! How men feel, "Served him right;" "Glad of it;" "Wish the penalty had been a hundred times as great!" Not only does he lose his civil rights, but he hardly retains so much as human rights, in the loose and careless language of common men.

Look at the jails in which we put criminals. Sometimes they are fit for beasts to live in, but mostly not. Our jails, taking the country through, are a disgrace to a civilized world and a civilized community. In their barrenness, they are scarcely less than instruments by which nature is allowed to torture men for their crimes. When I go back in history to see what justice has taken upon itself to do; when I think of the base trials, and cruel tortures in England, from whose loins we came, which hardly ceased within the memory of our fathers; when I think of the hideous imprisonments and unutterable wickednesses which have been committed by justice, I sometime think justice in this world, as it has been administered by fallable men, has been more heinous and more outrageous in the sight of God, than the crimes which it sought to punish. When the last-day books shall be opened, those will not be the worst books which shall show you the *bagnio* and the stew; those will not be the worst books that show you the pilferer's and the

robber's history: those will be the worst books that show you what Christian churches have done, and what organized civil justice has done; that show you the horrible tortures and cruelties that have been inflicted upon men. Heaven, in its very happiness, will stand aghast at the reflection and revelation of such gigantic cruelties committed by man upon man.

And although we have purged the organizations of civil society from such overt cruelties, yet hear how men talk when the community is roused up about a man. See how utterly devoid they are of humanity and pity. So intense are men in expressing their horror and indignation, that they turn remorsely against their fellow-men. As wounded wolves are said to be turned upon by the rest of the flock, and torn to pieces, so men that have done wrong are turned upon, and cast down, and rent and torn, by the rest of the community. If you want to know what hell is, go and hear men talk of fresh crime and fresh criminals.

Here and there men are to be found that feel sorrow and pity, but they are regarded as men of no souls. "Do you not care for the community?" say men. "Do you not care for law and integrity? What kind of a man are you, to plead for a man on whom society has justly put its branding-iron?" And when men see the red hot branding-iron put upon the brow of a criminal, and hear the flesh crackle, they think it is sweet incense before God, and that justice is appeased.

When a man comes out of prison, where, it may be, he has been justly confined, do men turn to him like a brother to a brother? Let a brother go wrong in his youthful days, and have you not a brother's heart? Let him come back, after some years of experience in vice, weak, worn out, dilapidated, and say to you, "Oh! my brother, I have been all wrong; I have suffered much, and I have learned much: give me a chance; give me a shelter; give me bread; give me sympathy, that I may save the last of my life, having wildly thrown away the beginning;" and would you not have a brother's heart? Would you not say, "Oh! brother, all that I have is thine. My purity shall be your shelter; my reputation shall be your shield; and my house shall be your castle. Only come back to me as you were when you and I were boys together, and whatever is mine shall be yours?" But do we take men back from jail in such a spirit as that? What if they are not reformed? I do not think jails and state prisons are apt to reform anybody —certainly not while such monstrous outrages continue, as when these places of punishment are put up at auction and sold for political favor, and when all sorts of men are for commercial purposes set to control them. Men are treated by their fellow men, not for reformatory purposes, but for social and commercial thrift, or some political emolument. And is the administration of such a system in the community likely to

reform men? When I see the disparity there is between sentences; when I see how a man in one county, for stealing a horse, is sentenced for five years, and another man, in another county, for a crime ten times more hideous, is sentenced for only two years; when I see one man sent up for ten years, and another for five, for the same thing; when I see that party politics can clear a man in one county, and condemn a man in another county; when I think of the feelings that men carry with them in prisons, and of the effects of their treatment, I cannot see much chance for them to reform. Anything but a prison for reformation, it seems to me, in this world.

And yet, when men come out of prisons, how does society turn away from them, and say, "Eh! jail-bird; I don't want him."

Such a man once told me his story. He had unconsciously, by the exigencies of his life, been drawn into the circulation of counterfeit money. By the way, there is a great deal of that done by men who do not make a business of it. I do not wish to be personal! For a man to buy counterfeit money on purpose to circulate it is a criminal offence; but if a man in regular business finds that ten dollars have been passed on him, what does he say, to-morrow, when you ask him, "Where is that ten dollars," but this: "I guess I let it slide?" Now, in law and in morals that man is a counterfeiter, though men do not think so.

This man had served out his time, behaving so well as to gain the approbation of every officer in the prison; and he came back to New York. He did not attempt to hide his history. He was willing to do anything. He had commercial talent and tact. He gave me a history of his reception from store to store by his old associates. Everybody felt as though he had a lothesome disease upon him. Everybody suspected him. Nobody was willing to trust him. After he had tried a year to find something to do, discouraged and well-nigh heart-broken as he was, the strongest temptations were held out to him by his old confederates to go into a life of dishonesty. They would show him friendliness. And he said to me, "I receive sympathy, Mr. Beecher, from none but the worst folks. I receive nothing but unkindness and suspicion from the best folks. What am I going to do?"

Oh, men! are you Christians? Is the heart of a Christian community so utterly barren of sympathy and pity that after a man has done wrong, and suffered the penalty of it, and wants to do right, he might starve in your streets, and die, and the stones be as piteous as your hearts are toward him? And are you a follower of God, who *pitieth those that fear him, like as a father pitieth his children?*

Consider how men talk about wicked men when once they are down, and are suffering. You need not go far to hear it. It is in your ears almost every day, upon one or another occasion. A man that has

been doing wrong, has been convicted. "I am glad of it," says one. "But," says another, "his whole family will suffer." "They ought to suffer." "But he was neglected and over-tempted." Ah! none of your mawkish charity. It is all a mush of magnanimity, this talking about wicked men in such a way. It is a sacrifice of justice." Says another man, "I would like to pull the halter." "He has made pain enough in this world," says another. "Now let him taste a little of his own drink," says another. Another says, "He has spilled blood: and every drop in his veins, if it had a separate life, ought to be killed." "Let him sup horror to his fill," says another.

Now, I do not say that the man ought not to be punished; but I do say, that all those feelings are expressions of the wild beast that is in you, and not of the divinity. You have no business to have any such avenging feelings. They may be excused in the first tumult of detection, or in the wild struggle of arrest; but the moment the criminal is safely handed over to justice, no man has a right to pursue him with an avenging feeling, or with the love of cruelty. That is ungodly—certainly unchristlike.

That there is a certain interest which men ought to feel in the arrest and punishment of evil doers, I affirm; but I also declare that it is very liable to degenerate into a most dangerous failing. No man has a right to give loose to his own personal malign passions, and then call it *conscience* or *justice*.

Why, suppose God should treat us as we treat men in this respect, what would become of any one of us? If he were strict to mark, if he were strict to judge, if he were strict to condemn and to punish, who of us could stand for one single moment? We are the very men that are set forth in the parable, where the debtor goes to his prince, and says, "Have compassion on me: I have nothing; but wait, and I will pay thee all." He had compassion on him; and he went out and found a fellow-servant who owed him; and he took him by the neck, and said, "Pay me what thou owest." And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and said, "Have compassion on me, wait, and I will pay thee all." And he would not, but hauled him to prison. And when the Lord of that servant heard what he had done, he called him and said, "Shouldst thou not have had compassion on thy fellow servant, since I had compassion on thee? By as much as you have been unfeeling and cruel to him, you shall bear cruelty and punishment yourself."

Are we not doing the same thing? Are we not described in this parable? Are we not sinners every one of us. And are there not dangerous pitfalls that any of us may plunge into at an unguarded moment? You may not be liable, perhaps, to temptations of violence;

but then, you may be liable to temptations of avarice. You may not be liable to temptations of dishonesty; but, you may be liable to temptations of social hilarity. You may not be liable to burn down your neighbor's house, but you may be liable to drunkenness, some of you. Some of you may not be liable to drunkenness, but you may be liable to lewdness. Some of you may not be tempted by any of the passions, but you may be tempted by that hard-hearted selfishness which makes the heart like the desert of Sahara—sand, sand, sand, without a green thing in it? Who is there that can rise up before God and say, "I have a right to condemn, for I have never sinned"? When God says, I have found a ransom for sinners, who shall turn himself with bitter and vindictive fury upon transgressors?

Thirdly. All men who are striving to live aright in this world, although they are far from successful, may be comforted in the thought that there are more who sympathize with them than they know or dream. God is on their side. There are a great many that have gone wrong, who feel an earnest desire to go right again. They would undertake it if they thought they could succeed; but it seems to them as though everything was against them. No, God is not against you. I believe that a simple childlike trust in God will go further to save a man who has stumbled, and bring him back, and make him a man, than all the sympathy and succor that the world can give. Oh! that I could infix that inward faith in men. Oh! that I could make men who have been wicked feel that God will not cast them off, that he is sorry for them, and that while he punishes them, it is for their good, and not for their destruction. Oh! that I could make men see God as I see him.

Take the reformation of the prodigal son. The young man went out from his father's house, and spent his substance in riotous living, and came, by his own fault, to the utmost degradation; and during all these years of his absence, there was not an hour in which he was absent from his father's heart. And when, by his misery, and not by his filial love, he was impelled to come back; when actuated by the lowest motives, and not by the highest, he said, "I will go home, and confess my wrong, and may be my father will let me work for him, instead of working here among swine, and for a foreigner; and when he had started, and was yet afar off, his father saw him. Oh, a father's or a mother's eye can see further than any telescope that ever art invented. Years had changed him. Time had degraded him. In place of the young, fair-cheeked boy that went away, here was a haggard, hollow-eyed, ragged, feeble, way-worn, dust-covered man. He was slouchingly drawing near to his father's house. And yet, though he was afar off, the father knew him. And he ran to meet him—as God runs a great way to meet every man that has done wrong, and wants to get

back to right. And when the son, humble and penitent, began to make his plea, and say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and I am no more worthy to be called thy son," the father did not let him finish it. He threw his arms about him. He forgave and loved him. Before he could ask to be taken back, he took him back. And he royally clothed him, and put sandals on his feet, and rings on his hand.

But that is not the whole story. The elder brother was one of those men who never went wrong. He was one of those men who never had appetites or passions, and who never stumbled. And when he found that his younger brother had got back, he did not, old pharisee of a brother as he was, think a word of his younger brother's being recovered from damnation. He did not care that his heart was going to have another chance. Nothing of that sort. But he said, in a rebuking way to his father, "All these years have I served you, and you never gave me a kid. You never did anything for me. But now that this worthless vagabond has got home, the fatted calf must be killed for him, and the ring must be put on his hand!"

Whenever a poor storm-driven soul tries to get back, there are just such men in every community, who stand and say, "I thank God that I never sinned so." And if any sympathy is shown toward the unfortunate one, they say, "This is just the way to make crime easy."

Oh soul! remember your Father in heaven. Remember that God who does not feel as man feels. And that you may believe he does not, let me read his words:

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Oh, royal abundance!

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways; saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

This is said to show what mercy God will have on men when they will only break away from their sins, and turn, and come to him. There is no such port on the whole coast. And yet, the heart of God is just that open port which any sinner may run into, day or night, without a pilot, and make sure anchorage.

If you have neither father, nor mother, nor brother, nor sister; if you are outcast, you have a God; and a God that, however wicked you have been, says—he will forgive? Oh no, that is not the way. When a poor man gives, he gives according to what he has. To give a few pence is a great thing for a poor man. But his neighbor, who is better off, says, "I will give a dollar." And according to what he has, that is very well. But a man over the way says, "I am better able

than they, and I am going to give twenty-five dollars." It is heard of down the street where men are making money pretty easy and pretty fast, and one says, "I will give a hundred dollars." Another says, "I will give five hundred." And another—a great hearted, generous man—says, "I will put down a hundred thousand."

People, talking about these men, say, "They are giving, not only according to their means, but according to their dispositions."

Now, when a man has been injured, and you are the man that has injured him, and you ask his forgiveness, and promise him, and placate him, by-and-by he says, "I did mean to have my revenge out of you; but as you acknowledge your fault, I will just let you go; but I want you to understand that I do not want to have anything more to do with you. I will *forgive* it, but I cannot *forget* it." That is one way of forgiving.

Another man, a little higher up has been sinned against; and the offender comes to him and asks to be forgiven; and he says, "It is lucky for you that you found me in a good-natured hour. I will forgive you; but I do not want to say any more about it. Go, poor devil, and don't trouble me again." That is a little better; but it is not altogether courteous.

Another man has been wronged; and when the offender comes to ask forgiveness of him, he says, "I have no personal feelings against you. I think you did me a great wrong; and yet, the only thing that hinders me from forgiving you, is the idea of what the effect of doing it too easily will have upon the community and the government and the law." On the whole, being in a metaphysical state of benevolence, he concludes that he will forgive the man. And that case involves some higher faculties than any of the rest.

Then there is another case. Here is a great-hearted, kind man. A criminal comes to him, and says, "I am here to confess that I have done wrong, and to beg that you will not be hard with me, but will forgive me." And the man says, "Oh, my dear fellow, come here. God be thanked that you had the courage to come. Forgive you? Why yes, of course I will. What can I do for you? Is there not something? I am so glad that you have come back. I was sorry that you did so foolish a thing; but it is all over now. Come and see me again. And do not be drawn away again. Forgive you? My good fellow, I love you better than ever. And let me help you."

Is there not a difference between that man's forgiveness, and the forgiveness of these other men? As a butler gets a cork out of a bottle, so men forgive, oftentimes.

Now if a man forgives, and has mercy, what does God mean when he says he will "abundantly pardon?" Remember that it is God who

speaks, infinite in power, infinite in mercy, infinite in love, infinite in empire and in being. What is "abundance" in such an one as that? And when God says that if a man will come back, and forsake his evil thoughts and his wicked ways, he will forgive him, and "abundantly" have mercy on him, what does he mean? What is God's abundance? Who can tell what that clearance, that utter wiping out of sin, is, which God promises?

There is no such lover as God. There is no such magnanimity as there is in God's nature. There is no such friend as God. There is no such harbor or refuge as his bosom. And if you have done wrong, go to your earthly friend if you will; but go to God by all means. He is loving, he is gentle, he is full of pity, and he says, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are but dust." "We have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldy unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

Almighty God, thou hast taught us to call thee by the name of Father. Thou hast inspired in our hearts that affection which children feel for their parents. And the more we learn the things that are right, to love them, and that are true, to believe them, and that are lovely, to rejoice in them, the more easily do we rise to thee; the more clear and comforting is the conception which we have of thy nature; the more are we able to enter into thy presence by sympathy. And our treasure is not the things which our hands have built, and not the things which we have gathered around about us of comfort, but our God. We glory in thee; in thy nature; in thy disposition; in the administration of thy government; in all thy thought and mercy toward us; in thy love, supereminent over every other attribute. We rejoice in thee; and in this joy there is no decline. Nothing can rob us of thee. Who shall pluck us out of thine hand? Who shall separate between us and thee? What power is there that is like thine? And in thee what power is there that is like love? And if when we were enemies thou didst love us, how much more now that we are friends? And if whilst yet we were alienated from thee thou didst give thine only begotten Son, and he freely gave his life a ransom for us, shall he not also, with it, freely give us everything that we need for living again? What though our sins do rise up before us, are they so great as thy mercies are? What though we remember the open door of temptation through which our adversaries full often have run, are they mightier than thou art? Is there in all the universe the evil that is so strong as the Spirit of God? Is there a providence of mischief that can measure itself against thy providence of mercy which thou art administering? Cleanse our understandings of servile fear; but fill them with filial fear. May we reverence thee, and draw near with humble boldness. May we have that familiarity which affection begets in the soul. And while we know thy greatness and tremble at thy purity, give us the access of children, that we may come up to thy very feet, and look up into thy face, and plead thy love as the reason of our confidence and our hope. For, if thou still dost love us, thou dost pity us. All our temptations, and all our downfalls, and all our difficulties, and all our darkness shall at last fly away, and we shall have victory, in that blessed land where there shall be no more struggle, and no more trial, and no more sorrow nor crying, forevermore.

Grant, we beseech of thee, this morning, to every one in thy presence, this sense of God with him. Speak unto every troubled soul the words of peace. Draw near and sanctify to each one the dispensations of thy providence. Thou art dealing with every one according to thine own wisdom; but with all for their good. To some there is given largeness of mercies and happiness; to some thou art giving darkness and bitter pains; some thou art chastising; some thou art caressing; thy face is hid from some; thy face shines out upon others; and all of them are dealt with in love. So do we deal with our children. Bring home to us the preciousness of the conviction that thou art a Father dealing with us in love and in mercy, even when we are in darkness, in pain and in tribulation. While we are tossing in the night upon the sea, and crying out for fear, oh, speak, and say to every one, "It is I; be not afraid." Come upon the troubled sea, come through our darkness, O thou Saviour, to help our souls, and to help us in this mortal life, seeking to save our souls. And grant that every one who is burdened this morning, and every one who is cast down by sorrow, and every one who is in doubt and perplexity, and all that are remorseful, may look up and behold thee very near to them, a present help in time of trouble.

Vouchsafe, we beseech of thee, thy mercies to all those who are gathered in our thoughts, and who belong to us—the absent members of our families; all that are in sickness; all that watch by sick beds; all that are in trouble and weariness; those that in thy providence are removed from us on various errands. Spread abroad thy hands this day, and speak peace to our beloved. And we beseech of thee that thou wilt bless not only ours, but all who lie around about us, and who are blood of our blood, and flesh of our flesh—the erring, the sin-sick, the outcast, the despised and the rejected. We pray that

we may have mercy given to us; and as thou didst bow down thy heavens for the most despised and the worst, so may we still keep a heart of love and mercy for the despised and the outcast.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt grant thy blessing, to-day, upon all thy Churches. Purify them in word, in doctrine, in administration. Grant that all who seek thee sincerely, with whatever error of understanding, may still have some portion of thy beams falling upon them, and that they may have some fruit of the summer of thy love in their souls. And may those who are preaching to-day throughout our land, everywhere, have thee on their side. Hear those ignorant men who are trying to preach to the ignorant. Let the little light which they have shine in the souls that are darkened, that they may know of the redemption of Jesus Christ. Be with those that try to teach the scattered and the outcast, gathering them together in Sabbath schools, to-day; and may they do their Master's work, in their Master's spirit. We beseech of thee that thou wilt be with those who are in far distant states and territories, in sickness, in weakness, in poverty, in neglect, unhelped and ensuccored. Still may they be able to endure for Christ's sake, and with invincible faith carry the tidings of the cross to every living creature.

We pray for all our schools and colleges and seminaries of learning. We pray that they may be sanctified and purified, and that intelligence may go forth throughout all our land.

And that this great people may be virtuous, not only lift them up in outward strength, but give them yet more mightily that spirit of strength which shall make them more just, more moderate, more true. And may this nation serve thee, and serve their fellow men, that all the earth may see thy salvation. Hasten that blessed day. These eyes shall not see it here; but grant that we may see it from above, in clearer lines, in brighter light, and in sweeter effulgence.

And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son, and Spirit. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON

Our Father, we beseech of thee that thou wilt bless us in the word of truth. Comfort and cheer us by it. Oh! the dark abyss of ignorance! Oh! the swirling malignity of human passions! Oh! the hell that is upon earth! Who shall deliver from the cruelty of men? Who shall deliver from the wickedness of our own cruelties and hard-heartedness? Thou art God. Thou sittest in the sweet love of heaven, and art all the time purifying the earth. As winds sweeping through cities and towns drive off the foul vapors which human bodies have generated; so thy great love is sweeping through the earth and cleansing it from the cruelties and malignities of the human heart; blessed be thy name, thou Sovereign of all recovering love! Oh, Jesus! sanctify us. Make us a little like thee. Make us sweeter than men are in their best estate of nature, that we may represent thy tenderness and gentleness and mercy.

Have compassion, we beseech of thee, on the poor, the outcast, the unfriended, the imprisoned, the condemned. Deliver them from the cruelty of men's hands, and from the freezing coldness of men's thoughts. Grant that we may know how to temper justice with humanity and mercy, and that we may know how to raise the fallen, cheer the faint, forgive the sinful, and live so that at last—at *last*—when our mistakes are done, and our sins are passed, we may hear thee say, with open arms, *Come—welcome.*

And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son, and Spirit. *Amen.*

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